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USER EXPERIENCES OF PRESCRIPTION AND OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUG ABUSE IN ADEN CITY, YEMEN.

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Introduction

Abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drug (OTC) is globally on the rise. In 2010, stable or downward trends for illicit drugs (heroin and cocaine) among major regions of consumption worldwide were being offset by an increase in synthetic and prescription drug abuse[1]. Studies about drug abuse and misuse in Yemen are still scarce. Besides, Khat chewing is legal, socially acceptable and is a risk factor for the abuse of other drugs in the Yemeni community[2].

The literature reported using prescription or OTC drugs either during (to potentiate its effects) or after Khat chewing sessions (to minimize the unwanted CNS and GIT side effects)[3]. However, the pattern and methods of mixing drugs with Khat in Yemen are still unknown, the pharmacist's attitude toward this problem and the abusers' in-depth experience have never been investigated before this study. In addition, this study was part of a larger project include both types of studies (Quantitative & Qualitative).

Facts (Yemen & Khat)

Khat (Catha edulis) a plant that grows in African horn and Yemen, and **Cathinone (Amphetamine like structure)** is the main active substance of Khat, Serotonin receptors shows a high affinity to Cathinone, which explains the euphoric effect[4]. Yemenis are usually chewing Khat to be more social and talkative during occasions and gathering, or to finish a certain work and enhance their focus.

In 1980, Khat was classified as a drug of abuse by the World Health Organization (WHO), due to its potential to produce psychological dependence.

Legalization : Khat is legal in Yemen as well as Somalia and Ethiopia[5]. However, in In 2014, the United Kingdom has brought Khat under the control of the Misuse of Drugs Act as a class C drug. The legislation has come into force in 24 June 2014[6].

Figure 1. Khat leaves contain (−)-(S)-cathinone, which is structurally similar to many different stimulants

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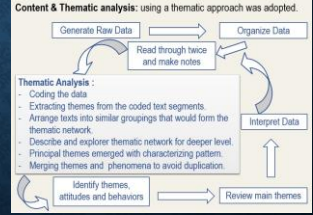

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METHODS

Data collection

- **Sampling:** convenience sampling was used, with a help from community pharmacists, who acted as gatekeepers, customers suspected of misusing OTC/prescription medicines in combination with Khat were recruited (April - Sept 2013).

- **Data collection and tools:** audio-recorded in-depth interviews of 30–50 minutes conducted in a private area at the community pharmacy. A topic guide in Arabic language was developed, data collection continued until data saturation had been achieved.

- **Confidentiality:** all participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Audio recordings were destroyed post transcription.

- **Safety and Security:** due to unsafe and unsecured situation in the area, the researcher (EA) had to be accompanied by two related male relatives all the time who stood at the door of the pharmacy in order to provide space and more comfort for the interviewee.

- **Exclusion Criteria:** users who visibly carried weapons (medium size and above weapons were obviously noticeable)

Data analysis

Data saturation was achieved after interviewing with **15 participants**. Male (n=11), age between (21-30 y/o)

Content & Thematic analysis: using a thematic approach was adopted.

Generate Raw Data → Organize Data

Read through twice and make notes

Thematic Analysis :
- Coding the data
- Extracting themes from the coded text segments.
- Arrange texts into similar groupings that would form the thematic network.
- Describe and explorer thematic network for deeper level.
- Principal themes emerged with characterizing pattern.
- Merging themes and phenomena to avoid duplication.

Interpret Data

Identify themes, attitudes and behaviors

Review main themes

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RESULTS

Experience of participants with drugs

1. Drug dealers and friends were the main sources of supply of drugs .
2. Drug effects reported by interviewees were altered, depending on the drug and dose used and whether mixed with Khat or not, to achieve the desired effect.

Pattern of mixing Khat with Drugs
- Dissolve in water
- Chewing with Khat
- Put in between gum and lip

Mix drugs with Tobacco

From video of the docotorstv.com

Role of Pharmacists and Physicians

1. How do you get your drugs from the pharmacy?

"*When the pharmacists refuse, I had to use my gun .Now I don't have to go the pharmacy as long as the drugs are available from dealers*"

"*No, the pharmacists doesn't resist at all, he's my friend*".

2. Has any doctor asked you about the drugs problem?

"*Doctors are afraid to ask if I consume drugs, there's one doctor who asked my friend once but there was no action from his side. The doctor can do nothing*"
"*.....doctors are usually afraid to talk to families and even to us, because of the weapons*"

Using a coded word to provide drugs

(SS, 40,M, employed, Alprazolam)
" *I can get the drugs from the same place I get Khat, but only for those who know how, you can find a Somali shoe-cleaner , there's a secret code that show the color you want on your shoes, if you say blue , then he understands that you want Viagra, if you say red , that means you want Tramadol* "

Some Shoes polishers provide drugs from dealers

(N,24 M, a pharmacist, Mix.Alprazolam/Khat)
"*It (the effect) depends on the dose of the tablet (Alprazolam). The taste of Khat gets better. I mean its effect gets better, my whole body feels relaxed and can't think of any problem. But sometimes with high dose I lose the ability to walk*".

Mixing drugs with khat , by researcher E.Abood2013

(N,24 M, a pharmacist, Mix.Alprazolam/Khat)
"*Grinding tablets-speaking about Alprazolam- and dissolve them in a bottle of water which we drink during Khat session, to make sure the effect will last till the end of session*|

Video khat and Yemen youtube.com

Mixing drugs with drinks

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DISCUSSION

Mixing drugs with Khat:

➤ The combination of sedatives with stimulants was the most used during the Khat session. This is similar to that have been reported in Ethiopia and Kenya7, in which Khat chewing was frequently consumed with alcohol and intake of benzodiazepines.

➤ Mixing Khat 'Stimulant' with 'Sedatives' could be more dangerous and unpredictable. The user would not feel he was sedated as much as if benzodiazepines were the only drugs taken.

Health professional's role and violence:

➤ The spread of guns and modern weapons have been increasingly prevalent in the last few years9. Similar Violence and aggression among drug abusers have been reported in other studies10.

➤ This violence was also reflected in doctors and/or pharmacists being afraid to counsel individuals suspected of abusing drugs. One reason for this could be the lack of training on how to deal with such violent cases11.

Khat

Sedatives
- **Alprazolam**
- **Tramadol**
- **Clonazepam**

- Yemen
- Ethiopia
- Kenya

alcohol

This might result in the person consuming sedatives beyond his physical limits, as stimulants 'Khat' would be hiding the signs and symptoms of sedative-overdose.

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